

JP Naik Memorial Lecture

TOWARDS A CRITICAL MASS: WOMEN IN POLITICS

By

Hon. Monique Begin, P.C., O.C

Professor Emerita

Faculty of Health Sciences

University of Ottawa

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Centre for Women's Development Studies

25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg, New Delhi-11001 (India)

It is now almost thirty years since the tabling of the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*¹ (R.C.S.W.) in the House of Commons on December 7, 1970, a week after Prime Minister Trudeau had been privately presented with the first copy of the document, and three and a half years after the Commission's establishment by Prime Minister Pearson on February 16, 1967. Here is *The Toronto Star* editorial, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country, the morning after:

*"At 2.11 p.m. in the House of Commons Monday, the Prime Minister rose, bowed politely to the Speaker, and tabled a bomb, already primed and ticking. The bomb is called the Report of the R.C.S.W. in Canada, and it is packed with more explosive potential than any device manufactured by terrorists. As a call to revolution, hopefully a quiet one, it is more persuasive than any FLQ manifesto. And as a political blockbuster, it is more powerful than that famous report of the controversial commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. This 488-page book, in its discreet green, white and blue cover, demands radical change not just in Quebec, but in every community across Canada. It is concerned not merely with relations between French and English, but between man and woman. The history of the problem it describes and seeks to solve is not 100 years of Confederation but the story of mankind. First, attention focuses naturally on the Commission's 167 proposals for practical action, from reform of the law to provide abortion on demand to rewriting of schoolbooks which teach sexual discrimination to our children. But controversial as some of these proposals may seem now, they will quickly be accepted in substance, if not in every detail. They are reasonable answers to real problems which can no longer be ignored, and governments and public opinion are ready for reform"*²

The editorial was a very exciting and welcomed surprise indeed, although I did not doubt for a minute that we had a great report and excellent recommendations.

But I also knew, in my heart of hearts, that we had one weak chapter: that on women in politics, our Chapter 7 entitled "*Participation of Women in Public Life*". As a young sociologist who had served as the Executive Secretary and Director of Research of the Commission, I had no idea that I would myself be elected to the federal Parliament, the first woman from Québec, less than two years later. I wanted to see far more women go into politics, at all levels; I sensed how important it was; I knew nobody would give women power on a silver tray - they would have to go and fight for it. But politics was not for me. Still, that weak Chapter 7 bothered me.

It is only years later, when I had left politics and started teaching women's studies at university that I understood the reason behind that weak chapter. Although we had interviewed every woman in Canada who knew anything about party politics, and had read or met our top political scientists, we had remained at the fringe in our analysis. Everything is there though: attitudes, prejudices, party organization and other obstacles in the way of women's participation are all identified. But we had no key concept to offer, no intellectual framework of understanding the basis for our exclusion. This is not surprising since feminist scholarship started in Canada (and in the western world in general) only after the report was released, later in the 1970s, at a time when I myself was completely taken up by a new, very busy life, as a Member, a Parliamentary Secretary and a Minister of the biggest portfolio in the government, that of National Health and Welfare.

So, in order to discuss women's participation in political power in a democracy, I chose to divide this presentation in two parts. Firstly, I will reflect on "What Women's Studies taught us": concepts of patriarchy, of the two spheres and the "personal as

being political”, and of women in politics as a “critical mass”. I have entitled the second part “What practice taught us”, namely: approaches of equal opportunities; of affirmative action, quotas, the case of the Scandinavian countries, and India’s current Reservation Bill.

What Women’s Studies Taught Us

It was exhilarating for me to discover feminist scholarship in the second part of the 1980s. At the time of our report, even the expression “feminist scholarship” was unknown³. Besides brilliant essayists like Simone de Beauvoir (woman as “the Other” and “the inessential” were a revelation to some Commission members) and Betty Friedan, we had no intellectual reference. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer's *Female Eunuch* were published respectively in 1969 and in 1970, when the work of the Commission had already been completed. The western world “classics” at the end of the sixties were female academics like Mary Beard, Alice Rossi, Evelyne Sullerot, Alva Myrdal, Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, Viviane Isambert-Jamati, Andrée Michel, Margaret Mead or Jessie Bernard. They were not referred to as feminist scholars; they simply were the first to study women as legitimate subjects in their respective disciplines.

Some feminist concepts appeared most enlightening to me; they gave me words to name what I had lived and observed around me in the House, in my Department or around the Cabinet table. Other were simply creations of the mind that did not, in my opinion, correspond to reality or help make sense out of it. “Patriarchy” is one concept I never liked, for it has become so ideological, but it is hard to avoid having to use it! Patriarchy is defined here as a system of relations of domination creating subjection, oppression, victimization, and above all, violence against women. That men, and the society for which they are responsible, have entrenched all forms of violation of and violence against women - from sexual harassment to rape;

from pornography to incest; from battering wives and children to murders - is surely the most explosive concept to explain exclusion. It is indeed intended to capture and expose the politics of sexism and male supremacy: the right of men to dominate women. As Bell Hooks wrote:

*"While male supremacy encourages the use of abusive force to maintain male domination of women, it is the Western philosophical (western only? I am not sure) notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated."*⁴

From men's physical or sexual violence against women in personal relationships where, deprived of real control in the public sphere, *"the home will restore to them (men) their sense of power which they equate with masculinity"*⁵, to social violence born out of unjust or unfair legislation against women, like that of a lack of choice in all reproductive decisions, there is a continuum which must be established once and for all. Patriarchy as a system - *"whatever term we use: male dominance, male supremacy or patriarchy"*⁶ - will never be denounced strongly enough. Politics and political parties are rooted in patriarchy.

Let us now take another analytical cut and look at women's traditional functions of caring, nurturing and ensuring good human relations in the home (and with the school and the community around), at their art of communications and coordination, and at the total absence of any sense of socio-economic value recognized to these functions, not even a symbolic status as used to be the case. This leads us, quite naturally, to exploring the notion of the "private (domestic) sphere" versus the "public sphere". That Victorian distinction between "the private sphere and the public domain", so well expressed by Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*⁷, is at the root of the issue. This distinction is ever present in politics. There is

definitely a non-expressed, but clear hierarchy of prestige and power amongst Ministers in Cabinet, at any level of government, all over the western world with the possible exception of the Nordic countries. Most important after the Prime Minister is the Minister of Finance, of course. Other "real" Departments, those that count, are ministries of an economic nature (objective or perceived), of a technological nature, of war and peace (Defence or Foreign Affairs). My former Department of National Health and Welfare, despite the fact that it managed 25% of the federal budget and was by far the biggest Department, was always spontaneously referred to by colleagues and senior bureaucrats, in front of me, as "a non-productive Department". This expression did not mean any offence; it was considered "a fact of life"! Other Departments dealing with people's issues (Health, Social Affairs, Veterans, Multiculturalism, Citizenship, Culture, Indian Affairs, Housing, Education, Cooperation and Development level, etc.) also find themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy. They are those expressing historical extensions of domestic responsibilities and private domains.

This dichotomy around which the world seems organized, taking different forms in different cultures - for example, the Arab tradition will speak of the world of light and open space (male) in contrast to the domain of shadow and confinement (female) -, carries a most insidious message to women and what they represent. My experience has been that Cabinet reproduces this manichean or dualistic view of the way life is organized in society. What makes up the male "real" world out there, by opposition to the "natural" private and personal sphere of women, should be de-constructed and debated forcefully with all its negation of women's experiences and very existence. In my opinion, the child care dossier and the failure of a Canadian national daycare policy or of provincial programmes, best illustrates how the "public sphere" still holds the view that the issue belongs to the "private sphere" of the personal domain. For many, politics embodies the essence of

the “public sphere”; it is at least its recognized symbol. No feminist analysis of exclusion can do justice to women by not adding this aspect of the problem to an analysis based on notions of power, authority, hierarchy and social control.

The other concept which interested me after I left politics was that of women in elected political office as reaching or not reaching a “critical mass” in their parliamentary institutions. In an article published in 1988⁸, Drude Dahlerup, of the Aarhus Institute of Political Science in Denmark, reported in her study of the relevance of the concept of critical mass when applied to the experiences of women in Scandinavian politics. At the time of her study, women constituted between 25 and 33% of elected representatives at all political levels in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland - the highest in the world. The questions she asked were crucial: is something supposed to change, and what, when moving from tokenism or a small minority to a large minority? Is there a crucial threshold at which a larger minority starts influencing the institution?

She gathered extensive empirical data from women in the five Nordic countries on party organization, strategies used to increase women’s political representation, and so on. Her conclusions based on the changes observed after women parliamentarians had become a larger minority, the threshold of which she establishes at 30-33% of the seats, are interesting:

- Changes in the reaction to women in politics: open resistance gone, disappearance of sexist remarks and of open exclusionary practices, decrease in stereotyping. The answers, however, are ambivalent about the absence or presence of discrimination against women.
- Changes in the performance and efficiency of women politicians: the so-called “failure rate” and high turnover of women in politics proved to be non-existent, but women nonetheless considered that they had not

obtained equal opportunity of carrying out their work as politicians.

- Changes in the political culture: norms and social conventions underlying procedures and meetings start to change; rigidity and formalism disappear; relationships become more egalitarian; the tone of discussion is softer; timing of events takes into consideration family obligations.
- Changes in the political discourse: “women” as a subject of discussion have entered the political arena and the electoral agenda. The issues they face in their lives because of their unequal status in society are now legitimate topics of public policy debate.
- Change in policy: although less definitive in her assessment of this dimension of politics, the author suggests that the political agenda starts to include issues of interest to women - either issues of the status of women such as pay equity, or support systems for families, etc. - when women make up a third or more of legislative assemblies.

I personally find this kind of research a most useful tool towards the empowerment not only of women politicians, but of all women. My critique, however, of a strictly numerical definition of the concept of a “critical mass” is that I am not convinced that 30% or more of women who are not committed to women’s issues would affect public policies much or would truly bring women into the world of political power and decision-making. Some women can be just as ambitious and power hungry for the sake of power and control as many men are, and ready to play whatever the game is to succeed. That will not advance the cause of women in society and helping to get more such persons in politics does not interest me.

Research must also complete this picture of “horizontal” participation, shall we say, with a “vertical” view of women’s participation, applying the same concept of a critical mass to evaluate their place in the hierarchy of power and the consequences of their numbers and roles in Cabinets and Councils of Ministers. But again, there is no automatic rule ensuring that a woman Minister will side with other women or support their issues just because she is a woman. Nor is there certainty that a woman Prime Minister will, as Gro Harlem Brundtland (whose appointment as the new Director General of W.H.O. I salute today) did in 1986 in Norway, appoint eight women to Cabinet out of 18 positions - clearly a critical mass - and thus create what was to become the “tradition” of 40% of women in any Norwegian Cabinet since.

When Prime Minister Trudeau appointed Iona Campagnolo and myself to his 33 member Cabinet in 1976, while Jeanne Sauvé had been “the” woman minister since 1972, it was saluted as a daring first in Canadian history! Not surprisingly, during my eight years in a Cabinet varying in size from 33 to 38 ministers, we remained either three or two women; nothing close to a critical mass. But I recall very well the excitement created in October 1990, and the powerful message sent, when Bob Rae, the new (socialist) Premier of Ontario (the biggest and most powerful province of Canada) appointed 13 women to his Cabinet of 32 ministers, or 40% of the membership. Although no study has yet been made, I would say from observation that women’s and people’s policy issues received exceptional attention during his provincial government (1990-1995). On the federal scene, further to his reelection of June 1997, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s current Cabinet includes eight women (some as junior ministers) out of 37 members - namely 21.5%, definitely a distance from a critical mass.

Two of the three concepts just discussed have been abstracted directly from the political experience of women. Pending an all encompassing conceptual framework explaining the absence or

the limited participation of women in governments, we must also take a close look at what has been tried and tested by women on the battleground.

What Practice Taught Us

The second wave of feminism, towards the end of the sixties, reconnected with the suffragettes' goal of having women in elected position, not so much as a matter of simple justice, but with a view to change public policy for a better world. Several approaches to overcome the resistance of the system were identified and tried. They basically fall in two extreme categories: reformist or remedial "soft" measures having an incremental impact on electoral processes and radical affirmative action imposing changes on the system, such as legislated quotas.

Canada falls more or less clearly in the first category. Let us start by looking at electoral results since 1970 and then on how women got where they are now. At the time of the tabling of the R.C.S.W.'s report, Grace McInnis, from the New Democratic Party (socialist), was the only woman sitting in the House of Commons of 264 members. In the last general federal election, on June 2, 1997, a total of 62 women were duly elected out of the 301 sitting M.P.s. From 0.4%, women now form 20.6% of the federal parliament; this increase covers a span of 30 years. When I was first elected, in 1972, I thought of us, the four newcomers, as a historical accident. With the passage of time, I could see the slow but irreversible, incremental progression: from 5 in 1972, women became 9 in 1974, then 10 (1979), 14 (1980), 27 (1984), 40 (1988), 53 (1993) and now 62. (In 1997, a total of 475 women ran as candidates out of 2,155 candidates, or 22%, for 14 officially registered political parties.) Based on an election every 4-5 years, and if there is no serious male backlash, women may form half of the Canadian House of Commons in another 30-40 years... Nothing to be particularly

proud of, but still a much better situation than is the case in 80% of the countries of the world⁹.

The incremental approach observable in Canadian politics reflects very much Canada's political culture: the accommodation of differences. After the tabling of the RCSW's report in 1970, women pursued the action undertaken in the sixties (when they formed a national broadly-based pluralistic coalition of anglophone and francophone women's associations in 1966) and, the reformist, moderate approach taken by the report of the Royal Commission in 1970 gave credibility to their cause, while the strong, general support it received forced the governments to pay attention. Ministries of the Status of Women and Advisory Councils were established, with the federal and provincial governments competing as to who would be the first to do so. Other institutional adjustments followed. The Electoral Act was amended to include the public financing of electoral campaigns. Canadian women started working on what has become an exhaustive list of practical obstacles to their increased participation in electoral politics. An international, comprehensive listing of these obstacles, and recommendations to overcome them, has been compiled and discussed by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group in 1994.¹⁰ All these measures remain however of a reformist nature and have been shown to lead to incremental increased participation only.

It is fair to add that the personal beliefs and commitment of the leadership at the top, Prime Minister (or Premier of a given province), also come into play in promoting women in politics. In preparing for the 1972 federal election (the one that followed the report of the Royal Commission), for example, Trudeau gave instructions to his two chief campaign organizers (Minister Jean Marchand for Québec and Senator Keith Davey for the rest of Canada) to manage to have some women elected. While Mr. Marchand decided he wanted three women from Québec - and delivered - Mr. Davey and his team got cold

feet. (Prime Minister Trudeau also appointed the first woman Speaker of the House and, later, the first woman Governor General. He also named the first woman judge of the Supreme Court. During his time in office, all memoranda to Cabinet had to have a paragraph on how the proposal presented affected the status of women - unfortunately, this no longer exists - and so on.)

Back to Québec: what happened in 1972 was quite simple. A short list of women with leadership in the Federation of Québec's Women (which we created in 1966), not involved with any political parties, was identified by men in the Prime Minister's Office, and each individual woman invited to run. This was done in great secret and without any consultation, and I discovered the "plot" long after, despite the fact that these women were all good friends. All women whose names were on the list refused for different personal reasons, except me. (I was told I was the last on the list!). I accepted after having negotiated three conditions (at least three women in Québec in order to avoid tokenism; a winnable riding; and financial help). This approach was not to be repeated, but it had given the initial impetus needed. In successive elections, women were elected on their own merit through the regular processes, at times against the candidates the party would have liked. I myself was reelected following due process in 1974, 1979 and 1980, the last two elections with the biggest majorities - number and percentage wise - in the history of Canada.

In parallel, women members of the two main federal political parties, the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives, discussed and tried different techniques inside their party structures. From women's associations whose only role was that of service organizations at the time of elections (serving tea, mailing letters, answering phones, etc.), they demanded both full integration and feminist women's caucus, then moved to reserved seats on committees and on the executive,

established support networks and created foundations to provide additional financial assistance to women candidates, while running locally for various elected or appointed offices at the constituency association level.

In the Liberal Party of Canada, for example, there is a National Women's Liberal Commission (as well as an Aboriginal People's Commission and a Youth Commission), which acts as an activist for status of women's issues as well as for "more women" at every decision-making level or in political appointments made by the Prime Minister, including Senate seats. The Commission is not always as powerful as I would like to see it in the ideal world, with divided loyalties when it comes to choosing and supporting candidates in federal elections. Its seven elected officers sit on the LPC National Executive. Delegates to Party conventions must include a minimum number of 30% of women as specified in the Party constitution. At the last general election in Canada, the Liberal Party strategists decided to have 50% of women candidates. Some were imposed by the Prime Minister on *riding* (constituency) associations, bypassing the usual procedures of nomination meetings. Of course, this effort towards 50% of women candidates included many candidates who did not stand a chance of winning a seat, for the riding in which they ran was traditionally identified with another political party. As to the Progressive Conservative Party, it made an effort towards at least 33% of women candidates.

The third¹¹ main federal political party, the New Democratic Party, of a socialist philosophy, has been a bit more forceful by formally adopting as its "objective" 50% of women candidates. It more or less followed the philosophy of Scandinavian socialist politics, hence the 40% of women ministers in Bob Ray's Cabinet of 1990. The present national leader of the N.D.P. and Member of Parliament (Alexa McDonough) is a woman, and so was her predecessor (Audrey McLaughlin).

Unfortunately, the slow changes towards some 20% of women in Parliament or in Cabinet in provincial or federal politics seems to have now become a sort of norm in the minds of male elites in Canada, a recipe without which electoral success is not guaranteed. But I cannot conclude that women in Canada are satisfied with their participation in politics, which they view as limited, limiting and unfair. Canadian public opinion, at least among women, was appalled when Chirac, as Prime Minister of France in 1986, recognized, when asked by the media, that he had "forgotten" to appoint at least one woman to his new Cabinet of ministers. Some Freudian slip!

On the other hand, Canadians in general do not feel comfortable with radical measures to speed up women's political participation. They are most ambivalent about the use of quotas to redress historical injustices. Affirmative action measures of all kinds have been discussed in the country for the last 20 years, mainly for various minorities and for pay or employment equity. In fact, they have been imposed by law in several provinces and in the federal government for these purposes. But quotas have never been legislated for political participation of women or other minority. However, as I do not know of recent opinion surveys asking women what they think of quotas in politics, I have no evidence of what they really think of that measure. (In France, where women are only around 6% in the National Assembly, 86% of citizens say they approve of affirmative action, while between 56 and 64% add they would approve of quotas imposed by legislative or constitutional changes.¹²⁾

This being said, there was at least one radical attempt to get many more women in Canadian politics, when the Feminist Party of Canada (F.P.C.) was founded in February 1979 by a group of women who met at Hart House, University of Toronto. The F.P.C.'s aim was to introduce feminist politics

and processes in the public arena, based on a perception that the three main political parties did not adequately reflect women's concerns. Its philosophy was to offer a politics of care and community to replace the politics of conquest and chaos. The F.P.C. had no hierarchical structure, no constitution and no leader, very much like the feminist parties of Iceland, France or Belgium. By June 1981, the F.P.C. had 700 members. But the separatist approach (of excluding men and of rejecting any organizational structure) prevailed in the end and the party disintegrated in the spring of 1982. *"The Feminist Party was fairly shortlived, from 1979 to 1982, but it caught the imagination of a number of Canadian women... In the end, however, the category of "woman" was not enough to build a political party around."*¹³ On the international scene, the most famous - and successful - experiment of a feminist party was that of Iceland in 1982 and in 1983, copied later by women of The Netherlands.¹⁴

Reflecting on the most recent statistics on women's political participation as released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union about a year ago in New Delhi, only in the four Scandinavian countries do women hold a third or more of parliamentary seats: Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark, in that order. The Netherlands and New Zealand follow closely. Since the June, 1997, election, Canada just makes it in the top quintile of countries. For many countries of the European Union, the participation of women remains insignificant. Besides the obvious, what is a key approach to successful participation of women in politics?

Starting in the early eighties, some countries did experiment with quotas to bring women in politics. As a general rule, we are talking here of quotas which are binding only on the party having established them. The results to date are of course interesting. *"In 1980, parties in both Norway and Sweden proposed legislation that would commit all political parties to a minimum of 40% women on their electoral lists; failing the*

success of this bid, various parties introduced the practice unilaterally."¹⁵ Today, all political parties in these two countries have internal rules requiring that 50% of their candidates be women. This happened largely, but not exclusively, with parties on the left of the political spectrum. The same holds true for Finland and Denmark or for Germany.

There are, however, quotas and there are quotas. The above-mentioned examples aim to influence *the candidatures*. But quotas imposed by legislation usually affect *the outcome* of an election and they are incumbent on all political parties. The 1991 "quota law" of Argentina, which provides that 30% of all candidates standing for elections have to be women "in proportions which will make their election possible"¹⁶, is too recent to permit an outcome analysis. But the current 25.3% of women in their Chamber of Deputies is most impressive and it places that country first for the Americas region. Two other countries have legislated a quota of women in Parliament: Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Korea, in a 20 to 30% range, closer to a critical mass of women, but again a far cry from parity.

Another radical legislated mechanism of a quota nature is that of "reserved seats" for women in legislatures. In a September 1997 seminar at the University of Dar es Saalam, a woman M.P. from Uganda, Victoria Miriam Mwaka-Nakiboneka, spoke in favour of quotas and explained how seats were now reserved for women in specific constituencies of her country. The audience was puzzled. I had never heard of that notion of quotas before. I since learned that, besides Uganda, four other countries have legislation providing for a proportion of seats reserved for women: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Nepal and Tanzania. The legislated quotas, however, go from less than 10% to around 14% of seats put aside for women.¹⁷ Following the June 1996 election, however, women made 18.1% of the Uganda Parliament, with 50 of them elected out

of 276 M.P.'s, an increase of 0.7% over the precedent election.

I read with fascination the September 1997 issue of *Seminar* on "Empowering Women", devoted to discussions of India's proposed 81st Constitution Amendment Bill, or "Women's Reservation Bill 1996", putting aside for women a third of the seats at each election, at every level of government. It is ironic to discover the frustrations of Indian women against their patriarchal political institutions when women of the western world, remembering Indira Gandhi, have long concluded that Indian women enjoy important political representation. It is also difficult to believe that women who are the cornerstone of rural life and community development projects had not found any significant official voice until the Panchayati Raj Bill - the 30% reservation of seats for women at village and subregional levels. It shakes my belief in "the power of the weak", to paraphrase Elizabeth Janeway's essay! But the reality is there: in India, women's representation in the 27 State Legislatures between 1952 and 1997 averages 4%. For the same period, in Parliament, it averages 10.3%.

One provision of the Bill that I have difficulty with is the concept of geographically reserved seats for women at the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures, as well as the fact that the seats are reserved on a rotation basis, changing at each election. How can women develop roots and be reelected in reserved seats, when incumbency is so important, if their individual seat is no longer reserved at the next election? I cannot judge the situation in truth, and I have everything to learn about India in the first place, a very old civilization and a most complex society, full of contradictions. I know that the old power structure of Indian politics finds itself at a critical point of its evolution, being challenged by new regional formations emanating from traditionally marginalized groups. Above all, we are in the middle of an election! So I am here to listen and to gather information with a view to understand

from within the dynamics of the Indian electoral process and the societal forces at play in it.

It remains that a part of me has great difficulty accepting the concept of quotas, for it seems based on an argument of *group representation* and not on an argument of *political equality* whereby a female individual would be representing, through the "other" gender, the general population.¹⁸ During the public debates on quotas in Argentina, the argument that women would bring a more ethical, altruistic, refreshing and committed contribution to politics won the day over the argument for a demand of equality. I know that many people around the world, and many feminists, share that view. It may even be true for many women, especially of an older generation, who were socialized in a spirit of service of the common good. But being especially ethical, committed, etc., are not intrinsic qualities of anyone of the sexes and remain shaky grounds for rooting what should be simple justice. "Essentialism" is the term used by Anne Phillips to define this modern way of thinking by which *the politics of presence* (or "the politics of essence": my reading) would be intrinsically better democracy than that based on *the politics of ideas*. Her point, it should be added, is that a politics of ideas which exists in isolation from a politics of presence - a cerebral politics of ideas - does not, deal adequately with the experiences of the groups excluded from the process. She does believe, however, that the complex relationship between ideas and experiences is best served, and so would be a more active and vigorous democracy, with both present in politics.¹⁹

Quotas raise of course all sorts of other questions, of a more practical nature. Will quotas, which are supposed to be floors, become ceilings? Does competence become a casualty with a quota system? How do women, collectively, maintain their credibility? Are women elected on a basis of quotas considered second class citizens in Parliament?

A recent proposal coming from Canada's far north may even be more challenging than the above notions of quotas. The new Nunavut Territory (province) - five times the size of Germany - to be operational on April 1st, 1999, put to a plebiscite a unique gender parity plan under which each of its 11 constituencies would elect one man and one woman. The May 26, 1997, results show that the proposal was rejected by some 59% of the Arctic voters. For the time being...

Although personally ambivalent towards quotas, I share on the other hand the impatience of all those who cannot accept the systemic obstruction to women's political participation. In the final analysis, I would probably accept the notion of legislated quotas, and give it my vote, if imposed at a significant level (of 30-33% or higher) which could truly move a society towards gender parity, and if accompanied by a time limit - say 20 or 25 years - in order to clearly frame it as a historical corrective measure.

The country-by-country analysis of the proportion of women elected to Parliament seems to establish a positive link between countries with quotas close to gender parity - self-imposed or legislated - and a meaningful participation of women in their legislatures. The Nordic countries are the best example. What remains intriguing is that the correlation between the degree of women's education, their workforce participation, their level of income, and the state of their country's democratic regime, used to explain many women's successes towards gender equality, is not enough to account for their almost balanced legislative and political participation in a few societies. Why Norway or Sweden and not France or the United States? I would submit that a country's distinct "political culture" - including the set of values and beliefs commonly shared by her citizens - might also be a determinant factor in this analysis.

Besides parties' institutional culture and countries' political culture, the electoral system itself is also a factor to be reckoned with. Feminist scholarship usually considers proportional representation systems as much better for increasing women's numbers than what we have in Canada, that is the single member plurality system or "first-past-the-post". I am not so sure of that conclusion, despite the cross national surveys undertaken. For example, proportional representation has played against women when it lead to a multiplication of small parties. It remains that those countries with the greatest proportion of women parliamentarians generally have a proportional voting system, either with closed lists or on a preferential basis.

Conclusion

In lieu of conclusion, it seemed to me that today's male politicians and party strategists think, without ever saying so, that there have to be a few women elected in a modern democracy. However, this is for balance (what they consider "balance") and not for equality. I have often felt that men, even remarkable men, do not understand the marked abnormality of women's absence in their work world. They do not understand what we have to contribute, nor the increasing subtlety of injustices and barriers that we have to conquer, even less what is missing in democracy. Some women in the ranks, a sparing presence, is understandable, even important, they think. Obviously, they do not realize that these are always overqualified women who are generally twice as competent as their male colleagues. But simply wanting as many women as men in politics (or in business, senior university administration or elsewhere) is seen as an abuse; it is exaggerated, even extremist. In fact, it is uncalled for. They are really convinced of this.

What my colleague and friend Dr. Vina Mazumdar sent me on Dr. J.P. Naik, whose name defines this Memorial Lecture,

seems at the opposite end of the male way of thinking I experienced around me. Dr. Naik obviously did not feel threatened by super qualified and competent women colleagues. This unfortunately is not the norm. If politics taught me one thing about men it is to never underestimate the male ego. Vina wrote: *"He used to tell me that he believed that men will never get liberated until women get liberated."* What a profound observation, for men are also victims of social roles that must be very heavy at times. Male mentors and colleagues like Dr. Naik are precious supporters of simple justice for women. They help us keep our sanity when preconceived ideas and outright prejudices become too stupid or when injustices are done to women. I am very honoured to have been invited to give a presentation bearing Dr. Naik's name.

Allow me to finish on two contradictory images. The first one is that of the official photograph of the October, 1997, Commonwealth Heads of Government summit in Edinburgh, which many newspapers of the world published. In three rows around the host, Prime Minister Tony Blair, are represented at the highest level the 54 Commonwealth nations. Their heads of state are all men, except for three women...

On the other hand, the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University will host in April 1998 the First Annual Summit of the Council of Women World Leaders. Already eleven women prime ministers or presidents, past and present, have committed themselves to this Summit - an initiative unthinkable of just a few years ago. So innocent looking, but so subversive an initiative... Unless men decide to circumvent democracy and the political process through other institutions in the global economic sphere.

Notes

1. *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*, Government of Canada, Information Canada, Ottawa, 1970, 488 p.
2. Anthony Westell, *The Toronto Star*, Dec. 8, 1970.
3. The first university courses on women were offered in Canada in 1970, with historian Natale Davis at University of Toronto, and sociologist Greta Nemiroff who co-taught with philosopher Prudence Allen at Concordia University in Montréal. At Carleton University, for example, historian Deborah Gorham started a course on "Women in Society" in 1971. At University of Ottawa, professor of literature Marie-Laure Girou-Swidorski taught her first formally feminist course in 1978. (Cf. Brodribb, Somer and Micheline de Sève, "Women's Studies in Canada", *RFR/DRF*, Toronto, 1987, 28 p.)
4. Hooks, Bell, *Feminist Theory (From Margin to Center)*, South End Press, Boston, MA., 1984, p. 118.
5. *Ibid*, p. 121.
6. Vicky Randall, *Women and Politics (An International Perspective)*, MacMillan Education, London, 1987 (2nd ed.), 362 p.
7. Woolf, Virginia, *Three Guineas*, Hogarth, London, 1938.
8. Drude Dahlerup, "From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics" in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1988, pp. 275-298.
9. *Men and Women in Politics - Democracy Still in the Making: World Comparative Study*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, Reports and Documents No. 28, 1997.
10. "Women in Politics", in *The Parliamentarian*, January 1995, LXXVI, No. 1, pp. 68-74.

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- 11 There are now five main federal parties with the recent arrival of the Reform Party headed by Preston Manning, a right wing, Western Canada based, party forming the official opposition, and the creation of the Bloc Québécois, a separatist party. But traditionally, at the national level, Canada has functioned with two main parties - the Liberals and the Conservatives - the Socialists forming a third, smaller party.
- 12 Gisèle Halimi, *Rapport de la Commission pour la Parité entre les hommes et les femmes dans la vie politique*, Observatoire de la Parité, Paris, 1996, 39 p. + appendices.
- 13 Nancy Adamson, Linda Brisken & Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1988.
- 14 *Encyclopédie politique et historique des femmes*, ed. by Christine Fauré, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, pp. 812-813.
- 15 Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1991, p. 84-85.
- 16 Alida Brill, *A Rising Public Voice (Women in Politics Worldwide)*, The Feminist Press, New York, 1995, p. 188.
- 17 These statistics come from *Men and Women in Politics...* (1997). Then, of course, there are 16 countries where all M.P.s, and 27 countries where some M.P.s, are appointed. All of them fall below the world average of 11.7% of women in legislatures and none of them considers gender as an explicit criterion of appointment.
- 18 For a remarkable discussion of this theme, see Anne Phillips, *Democracy & Difference*, The Pennsylvania State University

Press, University Park, 1993, 175 p.

- ¹⁹ Anne Phillips, "Dealing with Difference: A Politics of Ideas, or a Politics of Presence?" in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Ed. By Seyla Benhabib, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1995 (?) pp. 139-152.